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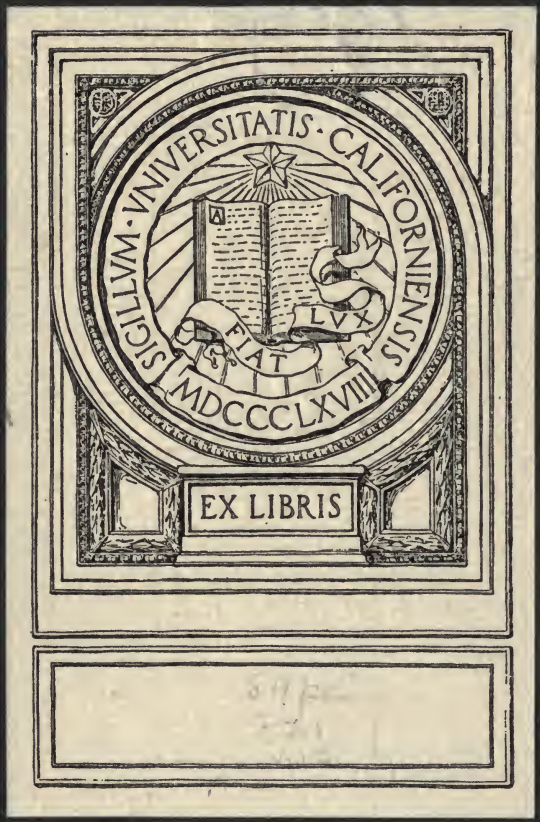
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Second Series
PAPERS FOR WAR TIME. No. 15

Christianity and Force

By

A. G. HOGG, M.A.

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BASIS OF PUBLICATION

This series of Papers is based on the following convictions :

1. That Great Britain was in August morally bound to declare war and is no less bound to carry the war to a decisive issue ;
2. That the war is none the less an outcome and a revelation of the un-Christian principles which have dominated the life of Western Christendom and of which both the Church and the nations have need to repent ;
3. That followers of Christ, as members of the Church, are linked to one another in a fellowship which transcends all divisions of nationality or race ;
4. That the Christian duties of love and forgiveness are as binding in time of war as in time of peace ;
5. That Christians are bound to recognize the insufficiency of mere compulsion for overcoming evil, and to place supreme reliance upon spiritual forces and in particular upon the power and method of the Cross ;
6. That only in proportion as Christian principles dictate the terms of settlement will a real and lasting peace be secured ;
7. That it is the duty of the Church to make an altogether new effort to realize and apply to all the relations of life its own positive ideal of brotherhood and fellowship ;
8. That with God all things are possible.

CHRISTIANITY AND FORCE

For some years past the impression has been growing upon me that the Christian Church has never yet learned to take seriously enough the teaching of our Lord regarding the right way to treat evil-doers. His words about turning the other cheek are too generally left on one side as an inconvenient mystery, whereas I believe they ought to be one of the luminous centres of all our thought about the meaning of the Christian Gospel, and also to be one of the living springs of all Christian conduct. If we understood Christ's teaching aright, I believe that we should hate war and a good many other things with a more perfect hatred, and yet at the same time feel it a Christian duty to support our country wholeheartedly in the present struggle. To exhibit the grounds of this belief, so far as the narrow limits of a pamphlet allow, is the object of the present paper; and for the reader's convenience of reference I begin by grouping together the relevant passages.

Sayings of Christ which bear upon

(*a*) *The treatment of offending 'brothers'.*

1. Take heed to yourselves: if thy brother sin, rebuke him; and if he repent, forgive him. And if he sin against thee seven times in the day, and seven times turn again to thee, saying, I repent; thou shalt forgive him (Luke xvii. 3, 4).

2. Then came Peter, and said to him, Lord, how

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oft shall my brother sin against me, and I forgive him? until seven times? Jesus saith unto him, I say not unto thee, Until seven times; but, Until seventy times seven (Matt. xviii. 21, 22). The parable of the unmerciful servant immediately follows (vv. 23–35).

3. And if thy brother sin against thee, go, shew him his fault between thee and him alone: if he hear thee, thou hast gained thy brother. But if he hear thee not, take with thee one or two more, that at the mouth of two witnesses or three every word may be established. And if he refuse to hear them, tell it unto the church: and if he refuse to hear the church also, let him be unto thee as the Gentile and the publican (Matt. xviii. 15–17).

(*b*) *The treatment of offenders in general.*

Ye have heard that it was said, An eye for an eye, and a tooth for a tooth: but I say unto you, Resist not evil (or, him that is evil): but whosoever smiteth thee on thy right cheek, turn to him the other also. And if any man would go to law with thee, and take away thy coat, let him have thy cloak also. And whosoever shall impress thee to go one mile, go with him twain (Matt. v. 38–41).

(*c*) *Civil rights.*

Blessed are the meek: for they shall inherit the earth (Matt. v. 5).

(*d*) *'Imperialism.'*

Ye know that they which are accounted to rule over the Gentiles lord it over them; and their great ones exercise authority over them [cf. Luke xxii. 25,

> ' they that have authority over them are called Benefactors ']. But it is not so among you : but whosoever would become great among you, shall be your servant: and whosoever would be first among you, shall be bond-servant of all (Mark x. 42–4).

In seeking to interpret this teaching, what I am anxious to arrive at is broad intelligible principles. About the application of these principles in particular circumstances it is much more difficult to reach agreement ; and in any case the question of the applications is too intricate to be discussed at all in anything shorter than a book. Now I think that the broad principles implicit in Christ's teaching on the present subject would win more immediate assent were it not for certain current misunderstandings ; and that these misunderstandings hinder the appeal of His teaching by bringing it into a false conflict with certain right and healthy instincts.

The first of these instincts is the feeling that there is something weakly sentimental in singling out physical violence as a specially hateful thing. But it is not Christ who is responsible for this possibly sentimental over-emphasis. In quotation (*b*) above, He deprecates *equally* meeting violence by violence, litigation by litigation, governmental oppression by passive resistance. In effect He says : ' If a man seeks to override your will, do not reply by trying to override his *in any way whatever*.' Whether right or wrong in principle, such teaching is at least free from sentimentality. The real issue to be faced is the use of force in the sense not of violence only, but of compulsion or constraint of any kind. The pain, maiming, or death suffered by those over whom men

get their way by violence is often a lighter ill than the mental suffering or moral loss of those over whom men have got their way by other non-violent means.

A second instinct which is brought by misunderstanding into a false conflict with Christ's teaching is the moral man's healthy impulse to fight to the death against any form of evil. Men perceive correctly that Christ bids us not to resist the evil *act*; but through oversight they fail to realize that He does so only in order that we may more effectually overthrow the evil *will*. The oversight is regrettable. For the truth is that the moral man's impulse is right; but that Christ, whose whole life was devoted to warfare against evil, is so much more in earnest in the matter than the ordinary moral man that He wishes us to surrender the clumsy instrument of compulsion in favour of His own much more costly, but also much more victorious, method of fighting evil.

We have only to look at Christ's teaching with an open mind in order to see how alive it is with the impulse to fight evil, to fight not its mere manifestations in selfish endeavour but its very self, the self-centred heart. In some of the passages quoted above ((*a*) 1, 2, 3) the offender is supposed to be a 'brother', not necessarily a brother by blood, but at least a brother in the faith; in quotation (*b*), on the other hand, there is no such restriction of reference in the cases supposed. Now in none of these passages is a passive attitude of simple non-resistance recommended. In quotation (*a*) 2, the only point discussed is the number of times forgiveness is to be practised, not the conditions preceding forgive-

ness ; but even here the parable by which Christ's answer is enforced depicts forgiveness as being *asked for*, that is, assumes previous penitence. With this exception all the passages recommend an activity of a kind calculated to produce just such penitence or change of heart in the offender. Where the latter is a ' brother ' and therefore likely to be open to reasoning, the activity recommended is one of persuasion, remonstrance, rebuke. ' If thy brother sin, rebuke him ; and if he repent, forgive him ' (that is, not only continue to love him, for that is always a duty even towards an enemy, but restore him to full brotherly confidence). ' If thy brother sin against thee, go, shew him his fault between thee and him alone : if he hear thee, thou hast gained thy brother.' In these two passages what is recommended is that wrongdoing shall be countered not by passive endurance, but by an earnest effort directed towards overcoming a brother's ill-will or disposition to wickedness.

Equally active is the course recommended where the offender is one who, not being a ' brother ', is not likely to be open to reasoning or remonstrance. To refrain from resisting such a one's aggressive conduct is not enough. We must actively further his interests at our own expense, and we must prove the eagerness of our desire to serve him by spontaneously offering more than he demands of us ((*b*) above). Yet while the active character of the procedure here enjoined is evident at a glance, it may seem less clear that its purpose is to fight evil by inducing in the evil-doer a change of heart. Now for myself I do not believe that this is its whole

purpose or significance. I think that conduct of the kind typified in 'turning the other cheek' will spring from the heart of the perfectly Christlike man not simply as a means of converting the wrongdoer to better ways, but spontaneously as the only kind of conduct natural to him in the circumstances. But while I thus admit that its effectiveness as a way of fighting evil by inducing a change of heart in the offender is not the *whole* significance of the kind of conduct which Christ recommends, I yet think I can show that it is a *part* of its significance; it is, I think, an important part of the justification of this seemingly strange teaching of our Lord. In order to show this I must first prove that Christ recommends this kind of conduct as a higher way of fighting evil; and then I must point out that this way of fighting evil does as a matter of fact assail it at its root in the evil will.

The proof of the first point lies in noticing what this new kind of conduct is intended by Christ to replace. It is intended by Him to replace older conceptions of *retributive justice.* From the twenty-first verse onwards the whole of Matt. v. consists of examples of what our Lord meant by saying in verse 17 that He came not to destroy but to fulfil the law and the prophets. He takes up one after another of the older conceptions of right and wrong, and puts in place of each not an abrogation but a deepening of the older conception. So it is evident that when, in verse 38, He takes up the older conceptions of retributive justice and bids us, instead of returning like for like, to return service for disservice, He must mean that this conduct is a deeper kind of *justice*, that is to say, that it fulfils the same purpose, and springs

from a purer form of the same motive, as does measured retribution. For if this were not what He meant, He would be abrogating instead of fulfilling the old law of retribution. Now while there are many theories of the meaning of punishment or retributive justice, all of them agree in defending it only as a way of fighting evil. Accordingly it follows that, since Christ inculcates turning the other cheek as a higher form of justice, He must regard it as a more thorough way of fighting evil. Thus I seem to have established the first point I set out to prove.

The second point, namely, that this method of opposing evil assails it at its root in the evil will, presents little difficulty. Regarded as ways of fighting evil, resistance and retribution may be efficacious in preventing the achievement or the repetition of an evil deed, but they can do little in the way of abolishing evil desires. On the other hand, no conduct seems so calculated to put an end to wicked inclinations in an offender's heart as that of the man on whom ill usage has only the effect of stirring him up to a more earnest desire to serve the individual who is maltreating him.

Close as we may now seem to have come to an apprehension of the principle of Christ's teaching, it is still necessary, for a fuller understanding, to return to the first of the two points just made, namely, that to 'turn the other cheek' is not only an impulse of love (which is self-evident) but an impulse of the spirit of justice too—an impulse of the spirit of hostility to evil. To my mind this conclusion is of the very last importance.

It implies, in the first place, that between the impulses of the spirit of love on the one hand and of justice

on the other, *when these virtues are present in their perfect form*, there can be no possible conflict and therefore no need for reconciliation. So it helps us to understand how, when God, in whom justice and love are present in perfection, made for Himself, through an Incarnation, an opportunity of visibly 'turning the other cheek' in willingly yielding to His enemies' purpose of crucifixion, He was in this act satisfying His justice as well as manifesting His love.

In the second place, the fact that Christ inculcates 'turning the other cheek' as an expression of the true spirit *of justice* at once lifts the conduct He enjoins above all suspicion of sentimental amiability. In 'turning the other cheek' we are not really obeying Christ unless the motives of the act include all that is pure in the sentiment of ordinary justice as well as of ordinary love. They must include, therefore, horror and moral indignation as well as pity and sorrow, the sterner elements in the total blend of emotion serving to make the whole converge in one passionate desire to rescue the wrongdoer from the wickedness that holds sway in him. True justice is thus a spirit that continuously oscillates between a passion as virile as that of a patriot fighting with his life in his hand against the forces of tyranny and a tenderness as yearning as a mother's love. To turn the other cheek in this spirit, because one is so Christlike that no other conduct will express one's real feeling, is as different in its effects from turning the other cheek reluctantly because one wants to be Christlike, as is the explosive power of superheated steam in a boiler from the puff of a tea-kettle.

It is quite obvious that no one can begin really to

fulfil this teaching of our Lord until the supernatural new birth has made him spontaneously Christlike in his emotions and desires. Neither can any nation do so in its relations with other peoples until the Christlike spirit has so permeated the national character that a desire to further the interests of other countries—a desire that grows sadder and yet also more passionate upon each new manifestation of foreign aggressiveness—has become a dominant feature of the public spirit of its citizens. A *reluctant* 'turning of the other cheek', whether by an individual or a nation, is futile and almost worthless; only when it is spontaneous is the Christian way of fighting evil either Christian or efficacious. But no nation that we know of is yet within sight of such spontaneousness in the practice of the Christian way of fighting evil. Consequently, either there can be no corporate or nationally organized warfare against evil at all, or it must be a warfare in which evil is fought by the clumsier means which Christ set aside. These are the only alternatives; which of them ought the individual Christian citizen to desire his country to adopt?

This question brings me to the third of the inferences which I draw from Christ's teaching that 'turning the other cheek' is the 'fulfilment' of the old law of retributive justice, and not its abrogation. For this implies that the law of retribution is a kind of justice, though not the highest kind—that it is a way of fighting evil, though not the most effectual way. We are to-day waging a war which on the surface is one of retribution upon Germany for violating Belgian neutrality, and which in its deeper issues is an effort to prevent by

force the subjugation of Europe to ideals of government which we believe to be retrograde, and, in their extremer developments, even definitely anti-Christian. According to the best judgment of our own conscience we are thus engaged in a real struggle against evil. As individual Christians we cannot wish that our country had remained passive in face of this evil; for we have seen that passivity in the face of evil is even further removed than the spirit of retribution from our Lord's ideal of what constitutes the virtue of justice, being in fact the very antipodes of that ideal. I personally believe that, had our country been absolutely Christian, and had its national institutions been organized in perfect conformity with Christ's teaching about true justice, it would have been possible for Britain to have fought this European evil in the higher and infinitely more effectual manner held up to us by our Lord. But Britain was not fit for that; and no refusal of an individual, or even of some thousands of individuals, to co-operate in fighting this evil in the lower way, namely, by war, would have so transformed our national spirit as to make it possible for us to deliver against this European evil the overwhelming blow of a perfectly Christlike treatment of the international situation. Hence it appears to me to be the duty of the individual Christian just now to obstruct in no degree the force of the clumsy kind of blow which is all that we as a nation are at present spiritually qualified to deliver at the evil with which we are faced, but on the contrary to fling himself earnestly into the national effort, although certainly with much Christian sorrow of heart.

At the same time the duty of the individual Christian citizen by no means stops here. While labouring to render as effectual as may be the clumsy kind of blow against evil which the nation is delivering, he is under obligation to use every means in his power to prevent Britain from being ever again spiritually unfit to fight evil in the higher Christian way. The aim of this pamphlet has been to make clear the principle underlying our Lord's examples of this higher or truly Christian justice. With the true teacher's instinct, He Himself selected instances of an extremely simple kind. How to apply to the more complicated situations of modern private life the principle He has illustrated for us, and further how to embody it in our political, legal, and economic institutions—these are problems which can be solved only by an earnest joint effort, in the slow prosecution of which we must be prepared for tentative groping, for fearless individual thinking, and cautious social experiment. Lest there be any failure to apprehend the complexity of the task to which we are thus plainly summoned, I conclude this paper with an effort to set forth my own understanding of the contrast between the principle we have been studying and the principles on which the institutions of our corporate life are for the most part actually based.

Our criminal law and its related organizations, and also our army and navy, are institutions which rest on the principle that it is good to defend right by might. Christ's principle is that it is better—or more instinct with the spirit of radical opposition to evil—to defend rights by voluntarily waiving them when they are inten-

tionally assailed, waiving them in order to make our undiminished goodwill toward the assailant more transparently obvious, and in order to be less hampered in our efforts to serve him. Difficult as may be the problem of organizing society in such a way as to allow the individual to act thus without implicating others against their will in the costly consequences of his own generous conduct, the principle itself is perfectly clear. In so far as God's will really reigns on earth, Christ tells us (quotation (*c*) above), valid rights of citizenship belong only to the meek, that is, to those who insist upon no rights not willingly conceded.

Again, the extension and administration of our imperial rule rests, to a large extent, upon the principle that, since it is better for the world in general and for individual peoples in particular that wiser laws and more intelligent institutions should displace those that are inferior, possession of the statesmanlike vision to conceive of such reforms in laws and institutions confers on the imperial race the right—or should we say, creates for it the duty? —of imposing these reforms by authority and constraint upon peoples who are not yet wise enough to desire them. Over against this stands Christ's teaching (quotation (*d*) above), that in a Christian community magnanimous dreams, visions of the *rôle* of public benefactor, confer no right to authority, but summon their possessor to inspire from below instead of dictating from above. Paternal government is not intrinsically wrong, but it is inferior. In providence God governs paternally; but even God, though He is really Father and not simply a greater fellow man, was not content without adding

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to the task of providence that more effectual struggle for good and against evil in which He 'made Himself of no reputation'.

Does the contrast which I have sketched between the principles on which our organized social life is based and the principle inculcated by our Lord make the task of embodying the latter in our laws and institutions appear a hopeless undertaking? It may well do so for any whose faith is inspired by anything less than the Incarnation and the Cross, for these are the greatest witnesses both to the imperiousness of the principle and to its victorious efficacy. Mere general history, if we turn to it for instruction, can give us little encouragement, although it cannot directly discourage. For history speaks with a double voice. On the one hand, in the gradual establishment of security and social order, and in the benefits of imperial domination, history has given abundant demonstration that force and authoritative dictation have been factors helping towards some achievement of the ideals aimed at by noble and statesmanlike minds. On the other hand, in the legacies of bitterness left by wars, in social and political discontent, and in the persistence of the criminal class, history offers evidence that the methods of force and dictation prevent these ideals from being realized in full completeness. And over against this double trend of the evidence from history stands the impressive teaching of our Lord regarding the true way of defending rights and achieving ideals of public betterment—teaching which history can neither confute nor corroborate, because there has been no serious attempt to embody

it on the large scale in the institutions of corporate life, and distressingly little conformity with it even in individual conduct. And that teaching comes to us, as we have seen, not only in isolated passages of Scripture of possibly disputable interpretation, but above all in the central message of our faith, the 'good news' that the One most qualified for the exercise of force and authority, our God Himself, chose to conquer evil and inaugurate on earth the reign of perfect righteousness by denuding Himself of the rights of paternal government and coming 'not to be served but to serve, and to give His life a ransom for many'.

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